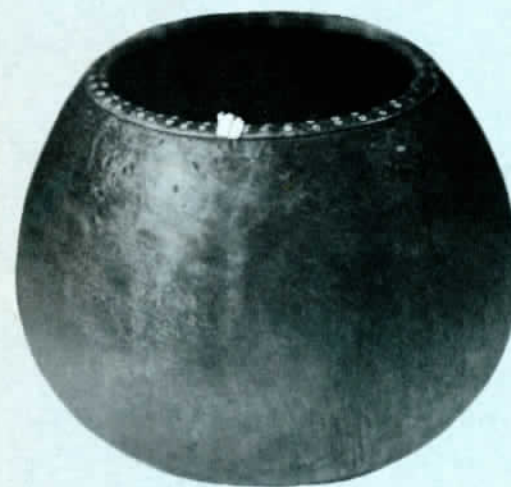


MALKI MUSEUM BROCHURE NO. 4

THE CHUMASH INDIANS of SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

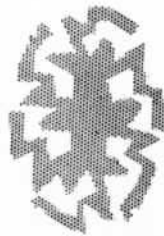
By Eugene N. Anderson, Jr.



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TO THE READER

This is the fourth in a series of brochures for the general public published by Malki Museum, Inc., on the Indians of Southern California. Brochures No. 1, 2, and 3 dealt with the Cahuilla, Serrano, and Chemehuevi Indians, respectively. Booklets in the near future will cover the Diegueno and Luiseno people. Malki Museum, located on the Morongo Indian Reservation near Banning, California, is a non-profit educational organization, and proceeds from the sales of these and other publications assist operations.



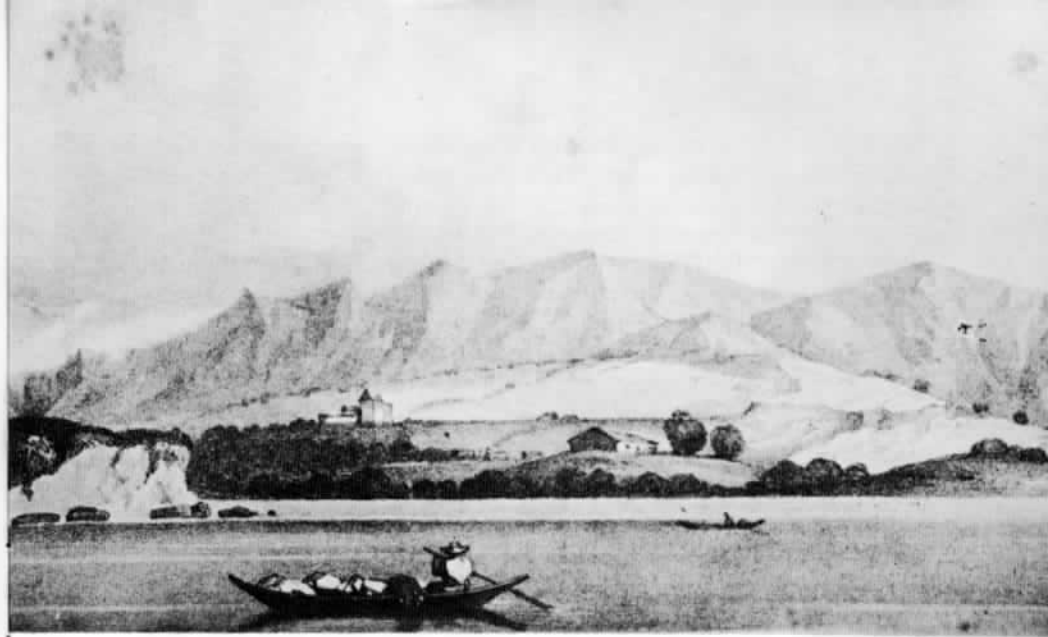
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is indebted to Campbell Grant for the use of all illustrations except the recent photograph of a Chumash house near Santa Ynez, including two photographs Mr. Grant secured from the Musée de l'Homme, Paris.

Cover photograph is a Chumash wooden bowl with an inlay of shell beads set in asphaltum around the rim. Back cover is a photograph taken in 1878 and now in the Musée de l'Homme, Paris, of a Chumash shaman in full costume. The shaman was a member of the Samala group from Santa Ynez Valley.

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Early drawing of Santa Barbara Mission made prior to 1839. A Chumash canoe is shown in the foreground. (Grant Collection)

HISTORY OF THE CHUMASH INDIANS

Only a few isolated and impoverished individuals remain of one of the most populous and rich peoples of aboriginal California. The Chumash, over thousands of years, had achieved greater and greater success in wresting a livelihood from their territory in modern Ventura, Santa Barbara, and San Luis Obispo counties. Their history since the coming of the white man has been one of steady decline.

Indians have occupied the coasts and islands of Southern California for ten thousand years or more. Whether the Chumash entered the area early or late is not known, but archeology shows no drastic changes in their lifeway during at least the most recent centuries. The Chumash language, although related to many languages of central and northern California, is highly distinctive, and has been separate from other tongues for thousands of years. The origins of the Chumash are thus shrouded in the mystery that covers so many ancient events in Californian prehistory.

When Juan Rodriguez Cabrillo, in 1542, made the first exploration of the California coast, he spent much time with the Chumash. He died in Chumash territory on San Miguel Island, south of the Santa Barbara mainland. He saw them as a flourishing, numerous, good-looking people, living in villages large enough to be called towns, and possessing plank canoes and other sophisticated items of manufacture. Subsequent explorers, such as Vizcaino in 1602, found Chumash life unchanged and undisturbed. Then, from

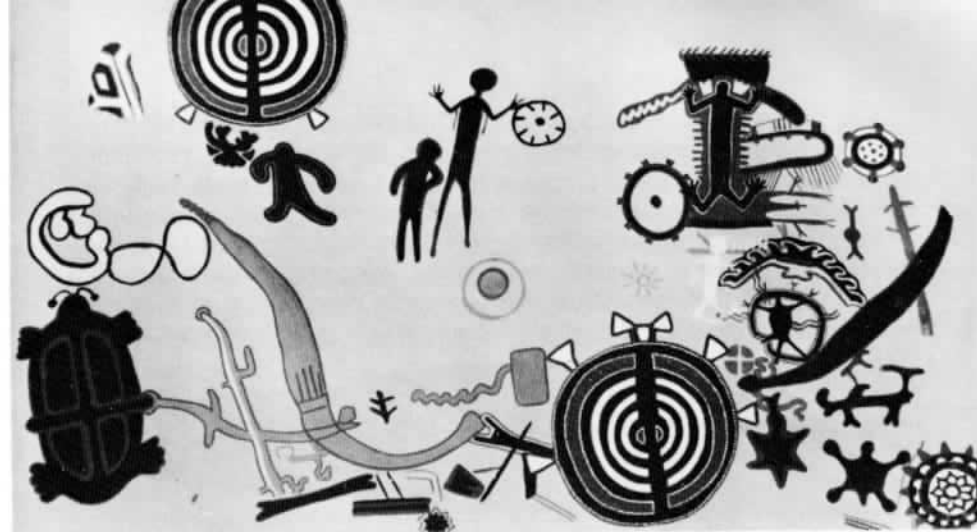
1769 through 1776, several Spanish expeditions passed through California; Portola, Fagés, Anza, Font and other explorers left many accounts of the Indians, including the Chumash, and attracted the attention of the Spanish regime in Mexico to the entire California border country. In 1782, came the first permanent white settlement in Chumash territory, the mission of Santa Barbara. It was soon followed by the missions of San Buenaventura, San Luis Obispo, Santa Ynez and La Purisima Concepcion; the density of missions in Chumash territory reflected the density of Indian inhabitants.

Missionization — and secularization in 1833 — meant destruction. Forced into slave labor, starving on thin seed gruel while the Spanish lived on wine and meat, the Indians were easy prey for the white men's diseases. Soldiers, whom the padres were unable or unwilling to control, looted and killed as they chose. The Indians continually escaped, and sometimes attempted rebellion; in 1824 an insurrection caused a major crisis at the Santa Barbara County missions, but the Indians were more concerned with escape than with conquest, and did not press their numerical advantage. Finally conquered and totally dispirited, the Chumash resorted to suicide and abortion. By the time of American takeover in 1848, the Chumash were reduced to a scattered and subservient population. They were rapidly absorbed into the Mexican-American communities, and by the time anthropologists became interested in the Chumash, few could be found who remembered anything of the old ways. The tiny Zanja Cota (Santa Ynez) Reservation near Solvang preserves the last shred of identity of the Chumash. There are probably fewer Chumash now than there are surviving Chumash place names; and few of the residents of Pismo, Lompoc, Sespe, Ojai, Saticoy, Point Mugu, or Malibu have even heard of the flourishing people who bestowed the names. In few areas has missionization been so successful in reducing a people first to slavery and then to death.

FOOD AND LIVELIHOOD

The Chumash apparently had developed a delicate balance with their environment. Living without agriculture, they had learned to draw on every available source of food, yet without exhausting any. They depended on a diverse and varied range of food sources; their lives were not limited by dependence on a single staple. Instead, they developed a highly sophisticated set of principles for exploiting the ecosystem. Few if any nonagricultural peoples in the world maintained such dense populations or drew on so many major food sources.

The mainstays of diet were acorns, seeds (especially chia), shell-

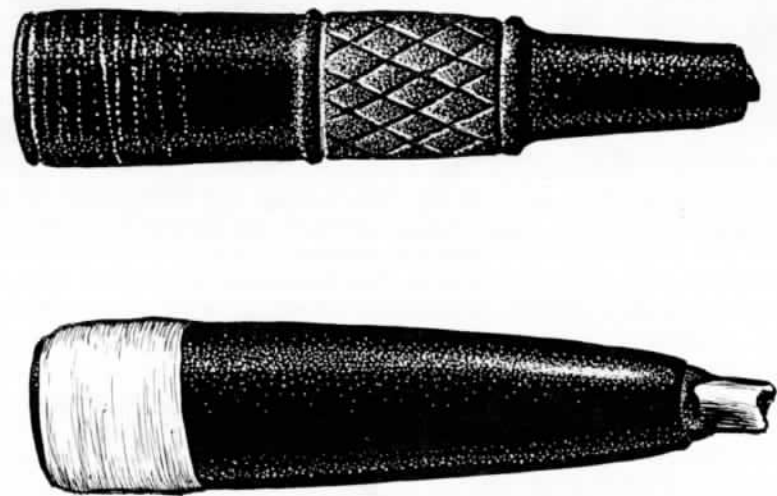


Chumash painting discovered between two leaning slabs of sandstone. Note the sun and rattlesnake motifs. Colors were black, red, and white on buff rock. (Grant Collection)



A red Chumash pictograph found in the Santa Ynez range. The pictograph contains salamander, sun, and water symbols. (Grant Collection)

fish, and fish. Oaks were unevenly distributed, and of course shellfish and fish were almost exclusively marine; the Chumash accordingly developed local specializations and also a far-flung trade network which served to equalize distribution. Game was common, especially deer, rabbits, and sea lions offshore. Antelope flourished on the plains; they were exterminated by the Americans within historic times. Early accounts stress the Chumash dependence on the sea, and archeology bears them out. Chumash village sites were set about



Two Chumash smoking pipes made of steatite. A band of fiber is wrapped around the top of one of the pipes. (Grant Collection)

with mountains of shell, liberally interspersed with the bones of every conceivable kind of sea mammal, fish and seabird. (The old shell-mounds are gone now, razed by developers or archeologists.) Seaweed, plankton, shellfish, and the giant sea lions and swordfish — all were taken. Whales were evidently used, since whale vertebrae were common enough to provide the standard chair, but probably only beached whales were helpless enough to be attacked. The Chumash in every way showed themselves wiser than their present-day successors, who have recklessly destroyed or at best ignored all the natural plant and animal resources of this incredibly rich coast.

Drought was probably the worst disaster the Chumash had to face. Recent years have shown how drought can destroy the land — plants fail to come up, animals die or migrate elsewhere. Chumash population has been estimated at eight or ten thousand persons or more — not a very high number in view of the amount of food available to the Chumash. Only war or severe droughts could keep the population so low — if the figures are correct.

SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

The Chumash were not a unified group. Separate but closely related languages existed in the areas roughly equivalent to modern coastal San Luis Obispo County; the inland Cuyama drainage; the nearby Central Valley foothill area in Kern County; the Santa Ynez Valley; the north coast of Santa Barbara County; the southward, channel coast; Ventura County; and the Channel Islands of San Miguel, Santa Rosa and Santa Cruz, where the people actually called themselves "Chumash," the name given by the whites to the whole stock. Within these languages, there were many dialects. Persons from villages a few miles away had trouble understanding each other's speech. As might be expected from this linguistic diversity, each village or small group of villages was independent. Villages frequently fought over territorial rights, refusals to attend each other's ceremonies, and similar causes. Each village or small group of villages was headed by a *wot* — a hereditary chief. Society was organized into patrilineal lineages, and these in turn into moieties; everyone belonged to one or the other moiety, splitting each village into halves. Evidence on the detailed working of these groups is vague and contradictory. The fundamental unit of life was clearly the village, led by the *wot* and his assistants.

Within the village there was some specialization. Probably everyone did his share of hunting and gathering, but social "classes" and part-time specialists existed. There was the hereditary aristocracy of the chiefs; there were the captain-owners of canoes, who seem to have formed a separate and prestigious group; there were skilled craftsmen in various media; and there were several kinds of religious functionaries — the shamans or "medicine men." The weather shaman controlled rain — another indication that drought was a terror to the Chumash — by placing several plummet-shaped charmstones in a circle, blowing smoke over them, and chanting. The charmstones were believed to stand up when imbued with spirit power; but how they brought rain is a mystery. Other shamans could change themselves into bears, the fiercest and most powerful land animals known to the Chumash. Still others sucked illnesses from patients, and/or sent magical poisons to enemies. There were apparently swordfish "doctors" who impersonated the powerful swordfish that drives fish into shallow water where they can be easily caught. From this list we see what the most vital concerns of the Chumash were: rains, health, food, and proper relationships with the powerful and uncanny animals such as bears or swordfish that seemed to be half-beast, half-man. Only males could be shamans, and their power was connected closely with visions induced by drinking the poisonous and hallucinogenic decoction known (in Spanish) as *toloache*, made



End of the road: a Chumash home near Santa Ynez in 1961. (Photo by Eugene Anderson)

from the Jimson weed (*Datura meteloides*). Power came from a guardian spirit. In addition to their main tasks, shamans could foretell the future and find lost objects. Religious experts and mediators between man, nature, and the supernatural, the shamans evidently had a lot to do in the large Chumash villages.

Other details of religion are little known. The golden eagle was a deity. Another deity, called Chup or Shup (or a similar name), seems to have been important, for the padres spoke of the need to destroy his cult, and the revolution of 1824 seems to have been in his name. Prayers to the sun and moon are also reported. As in all California tribes, there was a regular mourning ceremony to banish the spirits of the dead and to burn valuable goods for them. Early Spanish explorers reported "idols" — some form of magic device placed at strategic points, even around agricultural crops in mission days. Ceremonies were evidently frequent, intervillage affairs, and were apparently held in roofless mat enclosures. The dead were buried, with valuables, and a dead person's name could not be spoken, at least not until formally given to a living person later on.

CULTURE AND ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

The Chumash were famous for their manufactures; the Spanish admired their abilities greatly, and modern experts agree. The coastal Chumash and their southeastern neighbors the Gabrielino shared a high level of technical competence. Alone among Californian Indians, they made actual plank boats — narrow, rather rakish canoes, the planks sewn together and the seams caulked with asphaltum (tar). The Chumash called these *tomolo*. The modern town of Carpinteria derives its name from the boat-making Chumash "carpenter" there. The *tomolo* was a local development, well adapted to the calm waters of the Santa Barbara Channel.

Not surprisingly, the sea provided many raw materials. Shell disk beads were used as money, and traded all over central California, so that Chumash currency became a sort of standard currency for the whole region. Abalone and other shells were made into ornaments or inlaid on bowls with asphaltum cement.

A distinctive local material was soapstone (steatite), from quarries on the Gabrielino islands such as Catalina. Exceedingly beautiful bowls, carved swordfish and birds, and other sculptures were made from steatite. Pipes for sacred or secular use, charmstones, dishes and weights also came from this stone. Wood was also used for many items, and was worked beautifully. Pottery, however, was not made by the Chumash; they must have known about it, since it was traded right to the borders of their territory by eastward tribes, but they evidently preferred soapstone and basketry to the fragile and crude alien material.

BASKETS

Chumash baskets are coiled, like most Southern California baskets. Twined and wickerwork baskets were occasionally made, but only the crudest workbaskets used these techniques. Principal materials included *Epicampes* grass, rush (*Juncus*), sugar sumac, willow, all standard Southern Californian materials. Some baskets were sealed with asphaltum to hold liquids. From huge round- or flat-bottomed carrying baskets to tiny ornamental creations, from flat trays to necked water flasks, a great variety of forms and sizes exist. The mottled warm browns of undyed rush and the deep black of rush dyed with iron salts (and perhaps other media) created intricate geometric designs. After the Spanish occupation some of the finest baskets displayed such innovative designs as Spanish coats of arms!

PICTOGRAPHS

Besides being the expert craftsmen of Southern California, the Chumash were some of the finest painters in the uncivilized world. Their rock art decorates many caves and rock walls in the mountains of their country. Brilliant reds, blues, white, yellow, green and black were used to create huge symbolic designs. Geometric patterns and monstrous animals cover whole rock walls, especially in the most highly scenic, remote and craggy spots. It seems highly probable that these isolated places were religious retreats where shamans went to receive visions and hold ceremonies involving the sacred *tolache*. The resemblance of the rock art to the "psychedelic" art of our times is striking: vivid colors, dramatic swirling and angular shapes, intri-



A pictograph rock site in San Luis Obispo County, typical of the striking and dramatic remote sites so often used for complex pictographs. The Indian trails to the summit, worn into the rock, are clearly visible. (Grant Collection)

cate patterns, vague beings. The southern Yokuts, east and north-east of the Chumash, made similar paintings. More distant, but still clear, relationships link Chumash art with the cosmological, myth-portraying drypaintings of the Luiseno and Diegueno Indians of California and the Navajo of Arizona. Probably the Chumash too were recording schematized diagrams and portraits of the religious cosmology and beings that they saw under *toloache* or knew from myths.

ARCHITECTURE

The Chumash lived in dome-shaped (rarely conical) houses. These seem to have ranged from small huts to huge communal houses in which several families lived screened off from each other by tule mats. Houses were made of tule or reed thatch on a framework of poles. The communal houses may have been only temporary shades; there is conflicting evidence about them. One early Spanish source refers to the Chumash taking to "caves" to escape enemies; he is evidently referring to the earth-covered, probably semi-subterranean sweat-houses, big and small, which formed a conspicuous feature of every village. Here the men would heat rocks until the house was extremely hot, sweating themselves clean of dirt. Religious ceremonies may have been held in these "temescales" as they were in much of California.

Domestic furniture in an average house would consist of many baskets and bowls, perhaps a whale vertebra for a seat, and — in historic times — a bed. Probably the bed was a Spanish innovation.

The houses were arranged in straggling rows, sometimes with a lane between two rows. At favorable sites — lagoons such as Goleta

Slough and the Ventura River mouth — villages would grow until they loosely coalesced into a sort of prehistoric conurbation. Thus, even before the coming of the white man, unplanned chaotic towns and fused inchoate "urbanized areas" characterized coastal Southern California — just as they do today. Perhaps smoke from the many cooking fires even formed a primitive smog.

TRADE AND COMMERCE

Trade was of the utmost importance to the Chumash, who in their extensive trading and use of money were the capitalists of Southern California. The island settlements, comprising hundreds of people, were literally dependent on trade with the mainland. Bartering sea products for vegetable foods and necessary manufactures, they must have taken regular, carefully planned and extensive trips to the mainland. After the trade was disrupted, the people of the islands rapidly sank into poverty, and soon came (or were taken) to shore by the Spanish. The islands have never again been so populous. The biggest mainland towns grew up around sloughs where canoes could ride safely at harbor: Goleta Slough, Sandyland Estero, Ventura River mouth, Point Mugu and Malibu lagoons. Here the deerskins and seeds traded from inland towns, steatite from the Gabrielino islands, fish and sea mammal meat from the islands, shell-fish from the shorelines, and even exotic products from as far as the Colorado River were exchanged — perhaps even bought and sold, though the clamshell bead money was probably not much used except in ceremonial transactions. Trade routes followed the modern highways: 101, 1, 126, 399 and other modern numbered routes follow Chumash trails. And now as in prehistoric days, towns grow up at the termini and intersections of these routes. In Mission times, interior Indians — Mohaves and even Utes — raided the coastal settlements, driving Mission horses home over the ancient roads. Shells from the Pacific are common in prehistoric ruins in Arizona and New Mexico; many of these, surely, came from the Chumash coasts. Controlling many raw materials and the vital terminal segments of trade routes, the Chumash were in a superior strategic position; no wonder they were "lively" and "industrious," as the Spanish explorers said. Distribution of foods within Chumash territory and trade of money and manufactures with farther peoples seems to have been vital to Chumash life.

WEAPONS

The only unique weapon possessed by the Chumash was the spearthrower, and even that is doubtful; they may have learned of it only in historic times. Their other weapons were ordinary Californian ones: bows, cane arrows with hardwood foreshafts and (usually) stone



This photograph of rock paintings illustrates Chumash rock art with characteristic monsters and geometric designs. (Grant Collection)

or bone points, slings, and curved rabbit-hunting sticks. Their fishing gear was notably superior, with curved hooks of many kinds, and seems to indicate the importance of fishing relative to land hunting. Arrowheads were made from local stone, such as the outcroppings at Mussel Point north of Point Sal, where a small prehistoric quarry may be observed.

CLOTHING

The Chumash had adapted well to the warm climate of their homeland; their clothing was simple at best. When clothing was worn at all, it consisted of a loincloth or (for women) a very short skirt; in cold weather a rabbitskin or birdskin cape or blanket was added. The effect must have been not unlike the appearance of modern visitors to the Santa Barbara Channel beaches, with their bathing suits and beach towels.

GAMES AND MUSIC

Few aspects of Chumash life are more completely forgotten than their games and songs. The common Californian Indian games were played: kickball, shinny, hoop-and-pole, and gambling games. Dice were made of half walnuts and similar goods, filled with asphaltum in which shell was inlaid. Peon, a gambling game, was as popular as it was (and is) everywhere among Southern California Indians. Cat's cradle was played. Music and dancing were evidently popular, with rattles, flutes, whistles, musical bows and bull-roarers all in use. Stories and songs must have been popular and numerous, but we know almost nothing about them. A few animal tales survive; they feature Coyote, the inevitable trickster of Californian Indian stories. And a few songs or fragments of songs remain. One of these last may serve as an epitaph for the Chumash:

"Where in the world are we?

Would that we were in Hueneme,

That we might dance,

That the women might see us."

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BARROWS' ETHNOBOTANY

Malki Museum Press is proud to announce the publication of a long-out-of-print classic in Southern California Indian ethnography: David Prescott Barrows' *The Ethno-Botany of the Coahuilla Indians of Southern California*. Barrows' major work on the Cahuilla Indians — first published in 1900 by the University of Chicago Press — has long been an almost unobtainable collectors' item, eagerly sought by all who are interested in the Southern California Indians, native plants and their uses, and the Colorado Desert and surrounding mountain areas. Although basically a study of plants used by the Cahuilla Indians, Barrows' fascinating work is rich in material of interest to the historian, anthropologist, botanist, geographer, and lay reader.

Barrows' *Ethno-Botany* is the first in a contemplated series of work titled *Classics in Californian Anthropology*. A photo-offset reprint of the original, the work has been expanded to 136 pages with an introduction by Harry W. Lawton, author of the award-winning historical book *Willie Boy*, and a critical commentary by Lowell John Bean, ethnologist and co-author of *The Romero Expeditions*. Bean, an assistant professor of anthropology at California State College at Hayward, examines Barrows' research in the light of modern discoveries in anthropology and contributes must useful additional material in his critical appraisal. In addition, the volume contains an essay on Barrows' linguistics and the development of scholarship in California Indian linguistics since Barrows' time by Dr. William Bright, professor of linguistics in the Anthropology Department at the University of California at Los Angeles. Dr. Bright is the author of *The Karok Language* and editor of *Studies in California Linguistics*, *Sociolinguistics*, and the journal *Language*. Typography for the new edition and book design was under the direction of Vernon Tegland of Rubidoux Printing Company, Riverside. Hardcover copies of the book may be ordered for \$6.50 and paperback for \$4.00.